

Decades of Public Opinion Polls Show Strong Support for Freedom of Choice at End of Life

Patients, Voters and Physicians Support Compassionate Choices

More than 20 years of polling shows majority support of Voters and Doctors

National and California polls of patients, physicians and voters show majority support for aid in dying. Public opinion research has consistently found that Americans want terminally ill individuals to have the right to make their own informed choices at the end of life.

Polling has consistently shown that even larger majorities of Californians favor the concepts of AB 651.

Repeated public opinion surveys over the past 20 years have documented strong support, with more than two-thirds of Californians supporting end of life choice.

Majorities of every political group, including Republicans (64%), support choice.

Majorities of every religious group, including Roman Catholics (65%), support choice.

National polls show strong support, especially in the West



THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER
FOR THE PEOPLE AND THE PRESS

The latest national poll, conducted by the respected Pew Center for the People and the Press in December 2005, found that 70% believe “there are circumstances where a patient

should be allowed to die.” (With just 22% opposed.) State by state results were not released. However, the “West” has the highest level of support.

Even 62% of White Catholics supported end of life choices for a person who is suffering great pain and has no hope for improvement, as the Compassionate Choices Act provides.

Wake Forest University

This poll corresponds with a Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center study that showed patients would not lose trust in their doctors if it were legal for physicians to provide aid in dying. The results of the Wake Forest study were reported in the (December 2005 *Journal of Medical Ethics*). The Wake Forest poll did not even restrict end of life choice to the terminally ill, as does the proposed California Compassionate Choices Act, yet majorities of every demographic group would retain trust in their physician.

THE GALLUP POLL®

A nationwide Gallup Poll released in May 2005 shows a solid majority of people from all backgrounds and beliefs agree that terminally ill patients should have the right to choose to hasten their imminent deaths.

When asked if doctors should be allowed to help a terminally ill person die, 75 percent of Americans said yes. Even when pollsters used an inflammatory word like suicide, 58 percent said yes.

The Gallup Poll found majority support among all religious and political groups, among self-described conservatives and liberals, on the East Coast, the West Coast and everywhere in between.

Harris Poll

An April 2005 Harris Poll found that more than two-thirds of U.S. adults think that the law should allow medical euthanasia for dying patients in severe distress who ask to have their

lives ended. Two-thirds of the public would like their states to allow physician-assisted suicide as it is currently allowed in Oregon. The majorities in favor of Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have increased over the last few years.

A 70 to 29 percent majority of adults are in favor of a law that would “allow doctors to comply with the wishes of a dying patient in severe distress who asks to have his or her life ended.” This is an increase from the 65 to 29 percent majority who felt this way in 2001, but less than the 73 to 24 percent majority who did so in 1993.

A 67 to 32 percent majority would like their states to allow physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients, where (as in Oregon) three very specific conditions are met. This is an increase from the 61 to 34 percent majority in favor of the Oregon law in 2001.

Fox News Poll

An October 2005 poll conducted by Opinion Dynamics for Fox News found that a majority of Americans favor assisted suicide. When asked if they “favor or oppose legalizing physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients,” respondents indicated they backed assisted suicide by a 48-39 percent margin. Asked whether states should have the right to “let doctors prescribe medications that would help mentally competent, terminally ill patients end their lives,” support for assisted suicide goes up to a 52 to 37 percent margin.

In California, support for end of life choices is even stronger than the national norm



The Field Poll in March 2005 reported that 70 percent of Californians agree that “incurably ill patients have the right to ask for and get life-ending medication.”

Majorities of every major religion, including Roman Catholics (65%), and ethnic group

support compassionate choices. (*The California Poll*, 3/2005)

Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC)

A Public Policy Institute poll in September 2005 found Californians strongly support the right of terminally ill people to have choice over the end of their lives. Likely California voters support compassionate choices by a margin of 2 to 1.

In the PPIC poll, consisting of 2,004 telephone interviews, 55 percent said they favor “making it legal for doctors to give terminally ill patients the means to end their lives.” Among likely voters, support swells to 62 percent. Democrats and Independents both favor it by better than two-to-one margins, as did a narrower, but still significant majority of Republicans.

Polls of Physicians Show Majority Support

A national survey of 677 physicians and 1,057 members of the general public by HCD Research in October 2005, revealed that the majority of both groups believe that physicians should be permitted to dispense life-ending prescriptions to terminally ill patients who have made a rational decision to die due to unbearable suffering.

The survey indicated that nearly two-thirds of physicians (62%) and the general public (64%) believe that physicians should be permitted to dispense life-ending prescriptions.

The Finkelstein Poll of Physicians

Results of a 2005 national survey of 1,088 physicians by the Institute for Religious and Social Studies revealed that a clear majority of physicians believe that it is ethical to assist an individual who has made a rational choice to die due to unbearable suffering. ∞

More Information at:

www.CompassionateChoices.org